DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 221 544 SP 021 128

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TITLE Follow-up Studies of Teacher Education Program Graduates.
PUB DATE Oct 82
NOTE 9p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Accreditation (Institutions); *Graduate Surveys; Higher Education; Outcomes of Education; *Preservice Teacher Education; *Program Effectiveness; *Program Evaluation; School Effectiveness; *Schools of Education; *Teacher Education Programs; Teacher Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS *National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Educ

ABSTRACT

In the introduction to this paper, a discussion is presented of the needs and values of conducting follow-up studies of graduates of teacher education programs. Information that should be revealed by a properly planned and executed follow-up study is listed. It is pointed out that an effective follow-up study should provide information helpful in answering questions concerning course effectiveness, the proper sequence of courses, factors relating to the achievement and success of graduates after entering the teaching profession, better methods of instruction, and the degree to which the stated objectives and competencies of the teacher education program are being realized. A summary of ten specific reports submitted by institutions to the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher (NCATE) is presented with observations or conclusions drawn from an examination which focused on evaluation, program review, and planning. Because questionnaires appear to be the most widely used technique for securing information about the effectiveness of teacher education programs, 15 suggestions are offered in connection with the use of questionnaires and with the use of follow-up studies in general. (JD)

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FOLLOW-UP STUDIES OF TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM GRADUATES

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October, 1982

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FOLLOW-UP STUDIES OF TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM GRADUATES

> The institution keeps abreast of emerging evaluation techniques and engages in systematic efforts to evaluate the quality of its graduates upon completion of their programs of study and after they enter the teaching profession. This evaluation includes evidence of their performance in relation to program objectives.
>
> The institution regularly evaluates its teacher education programs and uses the results of its evaluation in the modification and improvement of those programs. (1:11).

I. INTRODUCTION

Why Follow-Up Studies?

There is little doubt as to the necessity for periodic follow-up studies of teacher education program graduates by those institutions which desire approval by The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Standard Six is very clear on this point. If it were not for this mandate, many schools would doubtless neglect to study the outcomes of their own efforts. Why this reluctance? One possible explanation might be that the anticipated effort, cost, and time requirements of such a study are a bit discouraging. Maybe the expectation that the study will yield very little that can be used in program planning and improvement is another discouraging factor. Also, those who are responsible for teacher education programs might be somewhat apprehensive about the results of such a study. (2:18).

The Values of a Follow-Up Study.

A properly planned and executed follow-up study of teacher education program graduates can be of great value. Although an institution may be visited by NCATE representatives only once in seven years, representatives

from the state department of education probably show up more often. University administrators, boards of trustees, and others may want justification for existence at any time. Follow-up study data can provide evidence to assist in that justification. This responsibility becomes increasingly difficult without the benefit of accurate data from a defensible follow-up program. But evaluation data should not be just for NCATE or state representatives; it should be for those who are actually engaged in preparing teachers and in the designing of programs to meet their needs. (4:24).

A properly planned and executed follow-up study of teacher education program graduates should reveal:

(1) The extent to which the graduates are accomplishing the personal and professional goals for which they were prepared.

(2) The effectiveness of various aspects of the teacher education program.

(3) The strengths and weaknesses of the teacher education program as perceived by its graduates.

(4) Suggestions for program improvement based on the results of responses made by graduates of the program.

(5) The mobility and location of program graduates.

(6) The number or percentage of program graduates who were employed immediately upon graduation.

(7) The number or percentage of program graduates who accepted employment in areas other than teaching.

(8) The number or percentage of program graduates who continue in school rather than seek employment.

An effective follow-up study of teacher education program graduates should provide information helpful in answering such questions as course effectiveness, the proper sequence of courses, factors relating to the achievement and success of graduates after entering the teaching profession, better methods of instruction, and the degree to which the stated objectives and competencies of the teacher education program are being realized.

II. THE NCATE REPORTS

The NCATE Reports in General.

According to NCATE, the maintenance of "acceptable teacher education programs demands a continuous process of evaluation of the graduates of existing programs. . ." (1:10). There can be little doubt but that NCATE Standards have stimulated the conducting of follow-up studies of teacher education program graduates. In spite of the stimulation applied by NCATE, violation of the Standard calling for the follow-up studies was cited as a weakness in fifty-eight percent of the programs reviewed during 1979, a rate second only to the violation of the governance standards. (2:18).

An Examination of Ten NCATE Reports.

Ten specific reports submitted by institutions to NCATE from 1971 to 1981 were examined with special attention being given to that section of the report dealing with "Evaluation, Program Review, and Planning." (Standard Six, 1981). No method of random sampling was utilized in choosing the reports to be examined; the ten which were readily available were utilized. (5:0).

A Summary of the NCATE Reports.

After examining the ten reports submitted to NCATE by the various institutions desiring NCATE approval, the following observations or conclusions relative to them seem warranted:

(1) Standard Six of the NCATE Standards is a definite stimulant to the conducting of follow-up studies of teacher education program graduates.

(2) The intervals at which follow-up studies are conducted seem to vary from three to ten years. This may be open to question as it was not always possible to determine the exact interval from the informaton contained in the NCATE reports.

(3) Almost all schools seem to utilize a variety of informal ways to attempt to assess the effectiveness of their work.

(4) Most formal follow-up procedures utilized a survey questionnaire mailed to teacher education program graduates and to their principals or supervisors.

(5) Relatively few of the schools utilized the National Teachers Examination or other measures which would enable them to compare their graduates with some type of national standard or norm.

(6) Most of the schools utilized some type of pre-service evalution of specific courses by the teacher eduction program participants.

(7) Most of the schools attempted to analyze the results of their follow-up efforts in some way. The analyses ranged from simple tabulations to the use of elaborate charts, comparisons, and statistical procedures.

(8) Most of the schools indicated some attempt to utilize the results of their follow-up studies for program improvement or modification.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Questionnaire.

Since the use of some type of questionnaire to first year teachers and to their immediate supervisors appears to be the most widely used technique for securing information about the effectiveness of teacher education programs, the following suggestions are offered in connection with the use of such questionnaires and about follow-up studies in general:

(1) Although there may be a desire to send questionnaires to all graduates to exhibit an interest in everyone, consider using a carefully chosen sampling technique to select a sample from the class or group to be surveyed. The use of such a sample is common in surveys today and has proven to be an effective practice in many situations.

(2) The group to be surveyed should be identified at least one year prior to their graduation so that they may be oriented as to the nature and importance of the follow-up study before they leave the campus. This planning with students while they are still in school will cause them to be more likely to respond and to recognize the value of the study since they understand why it is being conducted.

(3) Consider the possibility of encouraging certain groups of students to help plan the study and to assist with the collection of the data so that they learn from firsthand experience how the results are to be used to improve the program of preparation.

(4) An individual should be designated to be responsible for the follow-up study early enough to allow that person to plan and execute the on-campus orientation. Perhaps the chairman of the education department, the certification officer, or the director of laboratory experiences should be responsible for the study.

(5) Every effort should be made to maintain contact with the graduates of the target group or class between the date of graduation and the time of the follow-up study.

(6) Questionnaires should be accompanied by a cover letter which explains how the results will be used, why responses are needed from everyone, and how confidences will be kept.

(7) The appearance of the questionnaire will have considerable effect upon the percentage of returns.

(8) Arrangements should be made to follow the original questonnaire with a personal letter urging return of the questionnaire.

(9) Check with a legal counselor to determine if first-year teachers should be asked to sign a form authorizing their supervisor or administrator to evaluate their performance on the administrator's form of the questionnaire.

(10) Provisions should be made for additional mailings to those who do not respond.

(11) Arrangements should be made for machine processing of the questionnaire and for statistical analysis by a computer system whenever possible.

(12) An address list should be compiled as soon as possible utilizing all available resources—certification files, alumni files, placement files, letters to parents, telephone directories, etc.

(13) Investigate the possibility of making the questionnaire a durable mailout on a single sheet which can be folded, sealed, and mailed directly.

(14) Investigate the feasibility of telephoning non-respondents, especially if the total response rate falls below sixty percent of the total sample.

(15) A summary of the results of the follow-up study should be provided to those who might profit from knowledge of the results. Steps should be taken to implement modifications of the teacher education program as indicated by the results of the study.

What About On-Site Interviews?

While the distributed questionnaire, organized in a check-off format, has the advantage of clear-cut responses and can yield a good return, especially if mandated by an administrator, there is the problem of what to do with the answers to assure their validity or to expand on the suggestions which are made. Depending upon the objectives which one expects to achieve, an on-site interpersonal approach may be better. The respondents are more apt to respond openly to a frank discussion than to a series of blanks on a sheet of paper. Although it may take much more time to find out what's going on, the personal effort can be worthwhile in developing reliable information. The relationships among teachers, administrators, and others, hidden by individually checked questionnaires, may be made much more evident by face-to-face interviews. It would be an administrative decision as to whether or not on-site interviews are productive enough to warrant the time, effort, and expense involved. (3:24).

NOTES

1. Standards for Accreditatin of Teacher Education. Washington: National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. March 1, 1981.

2. Lillian Katz, James Rath, Chandra Mohanty, Akemi Kurachi, and Joyce Irving. "Follow-up Studies: Are They Worth The Trouble?" Journal of Teacher Education. March-April, 1982. Volume XXXII, Number 2.

3. Jon T. Powell. "Developing an Effective Survey." Media and Methods. January, 1982. Volume 18, Number 5.

4. Ronald Adams, James Craig, Shirley Hord, and Gene E. Hall. "Program Evaluation and Program Development in Teacher Education." Journal of Teacher Education. September-October, 1981. Volume XXXII, Number 5.

5. Reports submitted to NCATE by the following schools were examined:

   Saint Mary College. Leavenworth, Kansas. 1971
   High Point College. High Point, North Carolina. 1975.
   Bethany College. Lindsborg, Kansas. 1975
   Southern Missionary College. Collegedale, Tennessee. 1976.
   Central College. Pela, Iowa. 1978.
   Custavus Adolphus College. St. Peter, Minnesota. 1978.
   Carleton College. Northfield, Minnesota. 1979.
   Albany College. Albany, Georgia. 1981
   Indiana Central University. Indianapolis, Indiana. 1981.
   Livingston Unviersity. Livingston, Alabama. 1981.